



U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Chairman

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News Advisory

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House Unanimously Approves Hurricane Katrina Emergency Courts Legislation

Bill Authorizes Federal Courts to Conduct Business Outside of Geographic Domains During Emergencies

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The House today approved by a 409-to-0 margin Hurricane Katrina emergency courts legislation that authorizes federal courts to conduct business outside of their statutorily-defined geographic domains during times of emergencies. H.R. 3650, the “Federal Judiciary Emergency Special Sessions Act of 2005,” was sponsored by House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-Wis.), Ranking Member John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.), Judiciary Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property Subcommittee Chairman Lamar S. Smith (R-Tex.), Judiciary Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property Subcommittee Ranking Member Howard Berman (D-Calif.), and Rep. Louis Gohmert (R-Tex.).

Chairman Sensenbrenner said, “The creation and maintenance of a court system that allows citizens to adjudicate disputes is a fundamental responsibility of government. Where court operations cannot be transferred to other divisions within the affected judicial district due to wide-spread flooding and destruction, judges must be empowered to shift court proceedings temporarily into a neighboring judicial district. It is critical that Congress enact the legislation expeditiously so that the affected federal courts in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama may continue to function in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This legislation is part of the national effort to rebuild the devastated communities of the Gulf Coast region and restore hope to its residents.”

Ranking Member Conyers commented, “One of the many effects of the tragedy resulting from Hurricane Katrina is the problem that the federal courthouses in the region are

flooded, preventing countless civil and criminal cases from proceeding. Along with the tragic humanitarian results of such events, the administration of justice would come to a halt, thus depriving citizens from exercising their rights in court. This modest and non-controversial legislation would permit the circuit courts, district courts, magistrates, and bankruptcy courts to conduct proceedings outside their normal territorial jurisdictions in times of emergency.”

Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property Subcommittee Chairman Smith added, “The need is urgent. To illustrate why, consider the Eastern District of Louisiana, where operations are currently suspended. There is virtually no federal district court presence there. Judges and court staff are physically scattered throughout Louisiana and other states. But crime in the district – assault, rape, and robbery – hasn’t taken the week off.”

H.R. 3650 now heads to the Senate for prompt consideration.

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